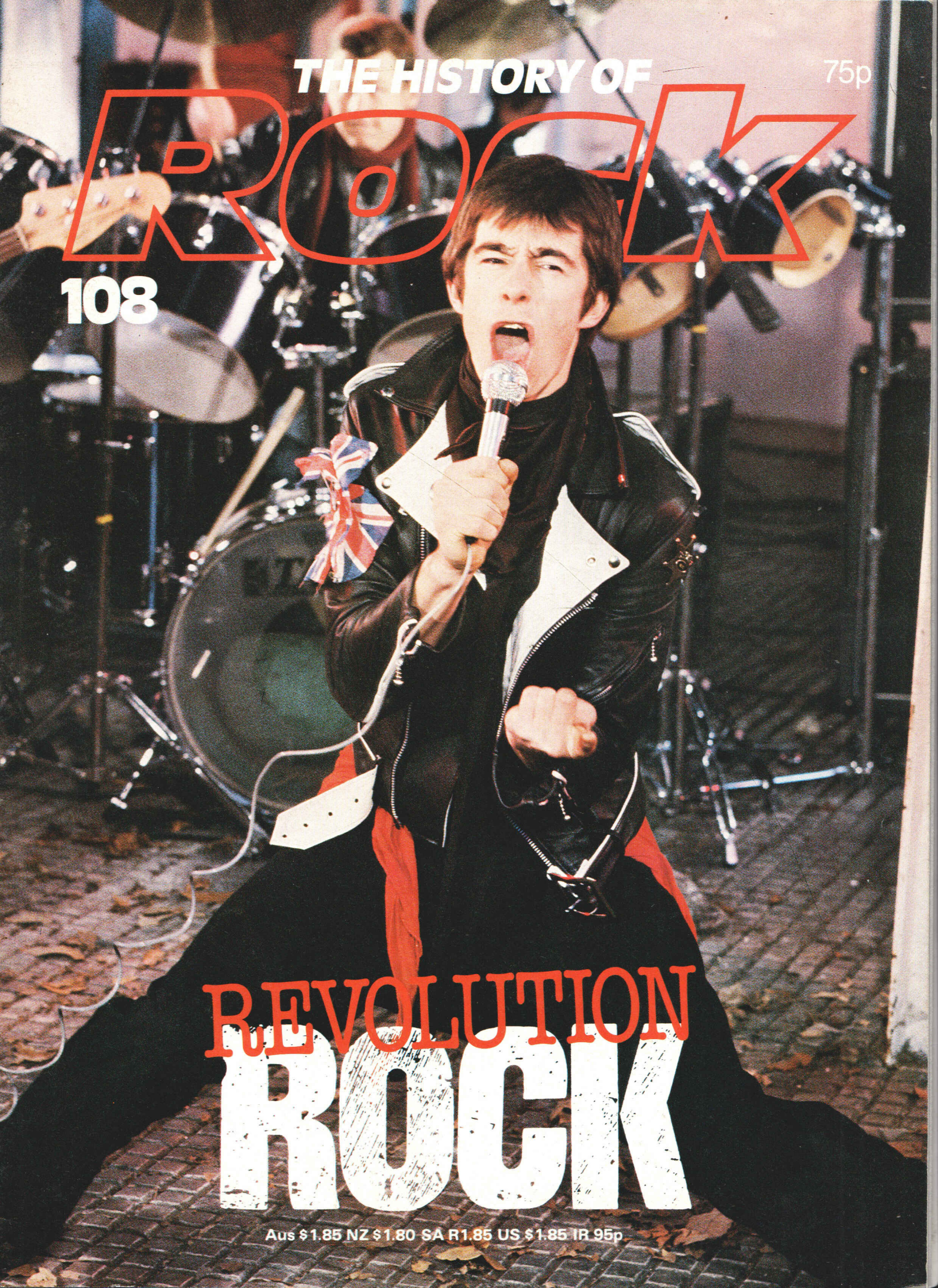
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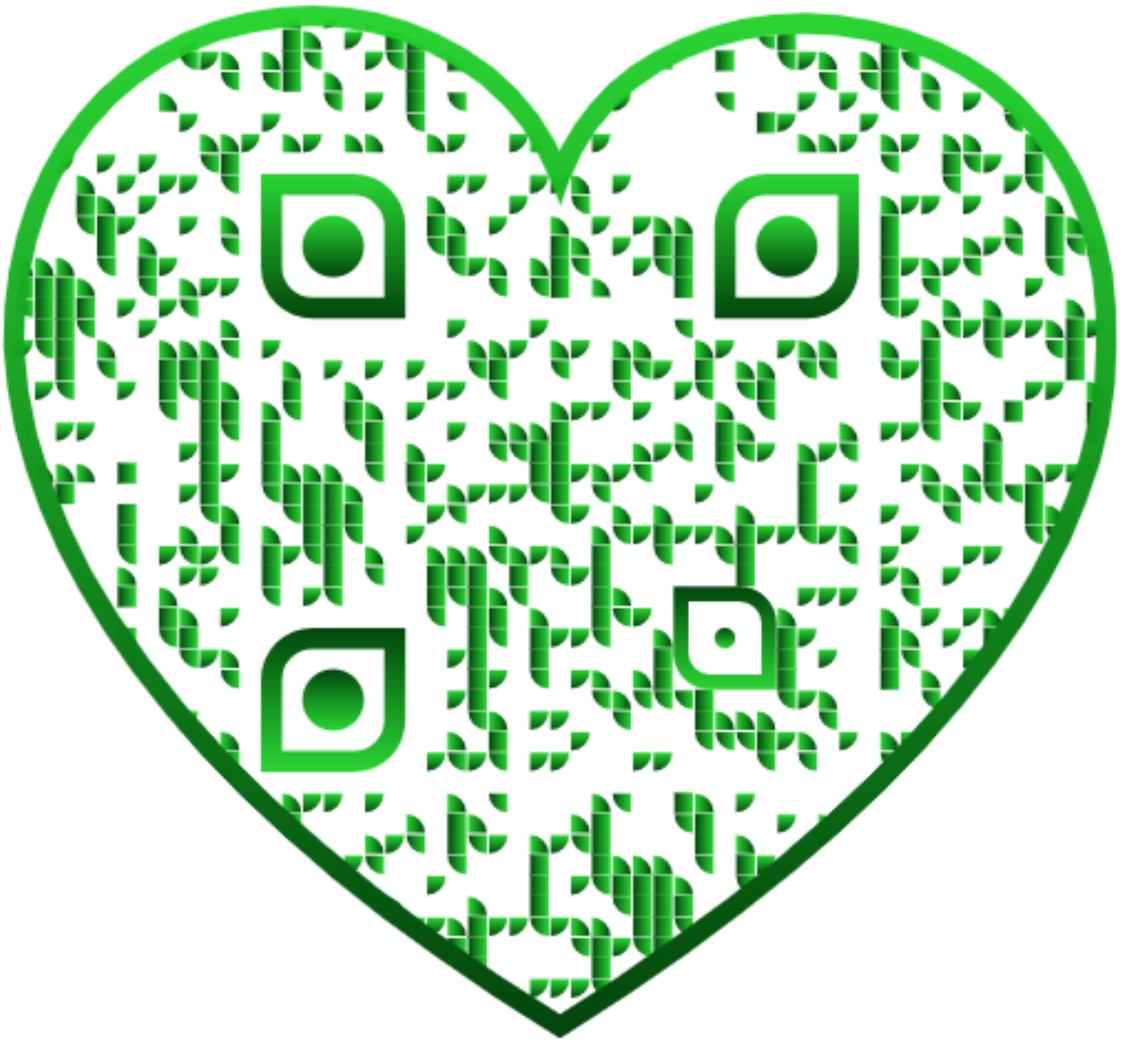

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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By the Eighties, soul music in the Sixties sense was but one strand of a bewilderingly complex yet dazzling black music tapestry. Jazz-funk and electro-funk jostled for the attention of disco-dancers, while Shalamar cooked up a pop-soul synthesis that brought a new excitement to the music. Meanwhile, rapping was breaking out of the inner cities to become a world-wide phenomenon as artists like the Sugarhill Gang and Gary Byrd talked themselves to the top.

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Children of the Revolution

Punk's splinter groups were caught between art and agitation

BY THE END of 1978, punk rock seemed to have run out of steam. The biggest bands were either on the verge of breaking up or taking well-earned rests following heavy touring and recording schedules. It rapidly became clear that the future of punk rock lay in diversity and a greater degree of political orientation. After all, what had initially been termed 'punk' had in many cases simply been energetic boogie played by pub-rockers with the foresight to get a new haircut.

Revolution rock

Political ideas had rarely been expressed in song by the early punk bands – the main exception being the Clash. However, lyrics with some political content became a prerequisite for subsequent punk groups. Two of the most popular 'ideologically sound' bands in 1979 were Crass and the Ruts.

Crass' gigs at London's Conway Hall rapidly became the meeting place for people of similar anarchic ideals. The group's uncompromising, clumsy but exciting performances, both live and on record, set a trend for this strain of rock by according the lyrics more importance than the music. The Ruts were one of the last bands to combine pertinent lyrics with tuneful melodies; their hopes of major exposure were cruelly dashed, however, by the tragic death – from a heroin overdose – of lead singer Malcolm Owen in May 1980.

Both these bands had largely peaceful fans, many of whom would soon find themselves in open confrontation with the mindless followers of Sham 69. This band was fronted by Jimmy Pursey who, somewhat idealistically, encouraged skinheads to attend his group's gigs. Unable to control the resulting violence, he reluctantly disbanded the group.

The only punk bands that continued to develop in 1980 were heavily influenced by Crass and attempted to appeal to a 'politically aware' audience. Several – such as Vice Squad, Discharge, the Exploited, Chron Gen and Anti Pasti – became punk favourites around the time of the Apocalypse Now tour. These groups heralded the revival of interest in punk, but in the main the music they played was a tedious repetition of a style that had been fully exploited three years before. These outfits, with the exception of Discharge (the only *genuinely* political band of the bunch) rapidly disappeared; nevertheless, they had created a sizeable following of fans determined to continue picking over punk rock's carcass.

The only British music paper to continue covering punk to any great extent was *Sounds*, the cause being championed by writer Garry Bushell. Week by week, *Sounds* earnestly publicised the behaviour of bands like the Exploited, who 'entertained' fans with such incitements to violence as 'Kill A Mod'. Punk had degenerated into nothing more than a musical soundtrack for an evening's head-breaking – a sordid state of affairs that was to continue throughout the early Eighties.

Above: The Hambrough Tavern in Southall, London, goes up in flames in July 1981. It was set ablaze during the rioting that followed an appearance by Oi! band the Four Skins.

Along with the so-called 'new punk' of the above groups, *Sounds* introduced another movement – Oi! This was initially hailed as a genuinely working-class music, but was disgraced by the overt racism of its principal practitioners – notably the Four Skins. The group's presence sparked off the ugly scenes of the Southall riot in July 1981, when skinhead fans of the band battled with the local Asian community. British punk in the Eighties had come to involve every imaginable kind of youth sub-cult – some able to relate to one another, some violently hostile. While those bands that had been influenced by Crass-produced songs of unadulterated, pointed fury, the Oi! brigade pounded out football-terrace chants of unrepentant, unpleasant stupidity.

Ball of confusion

The possibility that a worthwhile, concerted movement might emerge from the thrashing excitement of late-Seventies punk rock had not been aided by the back-biting and bitching of the British music press. This helped to create an atmosphere of directionless uncertainty, reflected by the brief duration of many groups and the cliquish attitudes of their fans.

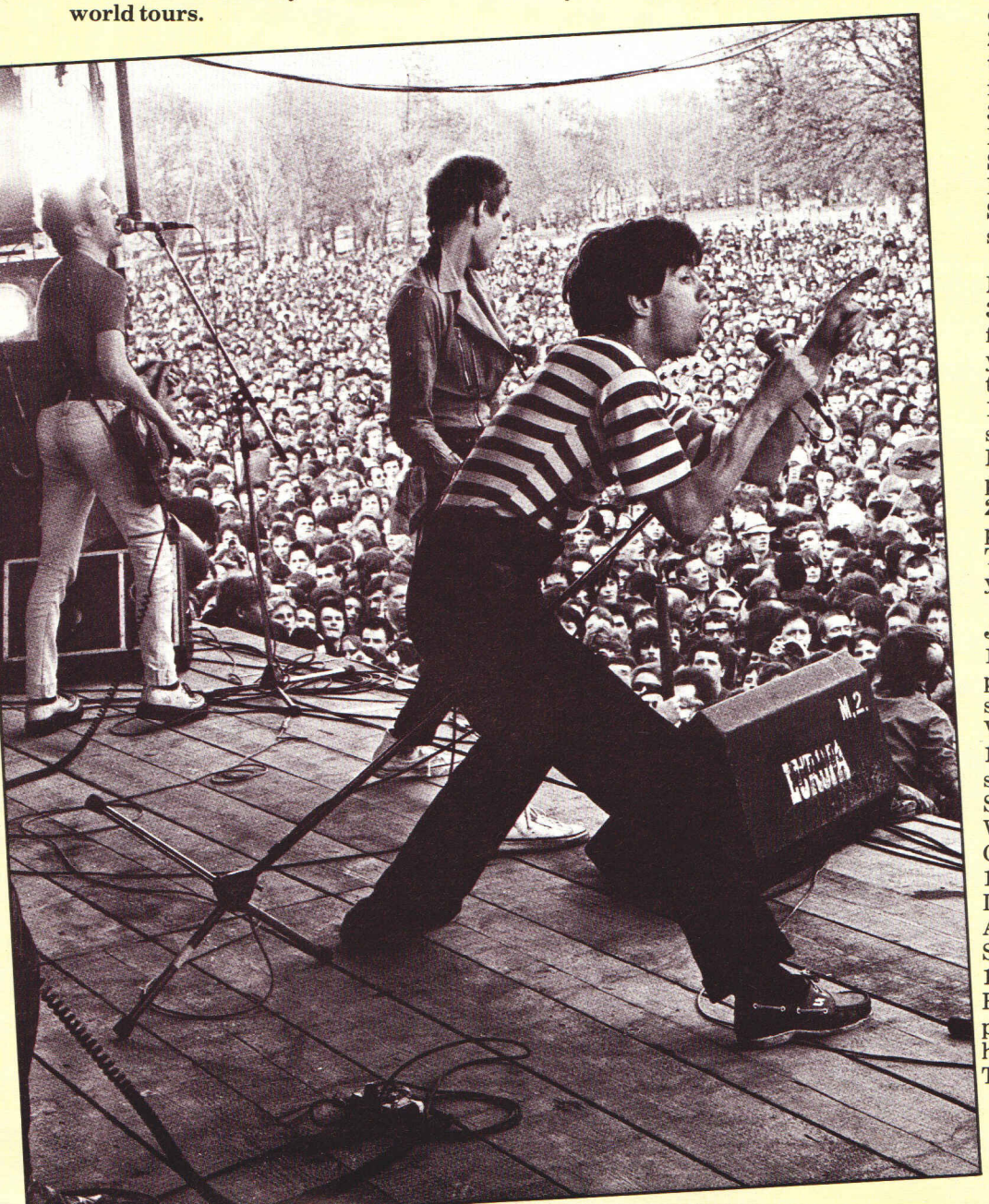
A more constructive side to punk was demonstrated by the groups influenced by the literacy, musical scope and avant-garde leanings of Siouxsie and the Banshees and Joy Division, such as Bauhaus, Sex Gang Children, Death Cult, the Mob, Alien Sex Fiend, Dead Man's Shadow and – best of all – Echo and the Bunnymen, Killing Joke and the Cure. While these bands displayed a number of good musical ideas and images, few appeared likely to achieve much more than cult status in the early Eighties.

MICK MERCER

ROCK '78

1978 saw the first wave of UK punk collapse with the demise of the Sex Pistols and the decline of its ideals into drunken aggression and political violence. Bands like Sham 69 found it impossible to play because of the violent following they unwillingly attracted. But despite this tendency, many punk bands united in an impressive show of opposition to racism, and the year saw many major benefits for Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League take place in Britain.

Although several 'new-wave' acts like Blondie were beginning to make an impact on the charts, they were eclipsed – on both sides of the Atlantic – by established acts like Abba and born-again disco messiahs the Bee Gees; old favourites like Bob Dylan and David Bowie, meanwhile, undertook massively successful world tours.



January
2 Bob Dylan's ex-wife Sara pleads not guilty to charges of punching a teacher while attempting to take custody of her children.
14 The Sex Pistols play their last ever gig at Winterland, San Francisco: 'Ever had the feeling you've been had?' Rotten sneers at the audience.
27 Jefferson Starship singer Grace Slick is arrested for drunken driving after appearing as a guest judge at an amateur talent contest, where she swore at contestants, sang through their performances and pushed them around.
28 Rumours start that the Sex Pistols have split up.

February
11 Jamaican vocal duo Althea and Donna have a UK Number 1 hit with 'Uptown Top Ranking', while the Bee Gees' 'Stayin' Alive' is at Number 1 in the US.
18 *Sniffin' Glue* – one of the most influential punk fanzines – ceases publication as editor Mark P decides to concentrate on his band, ATV.
20 Meat Loaf's 'Bat Out Of Hell' begins its three-year run in the US charts.

March
4 Abba are Number 1 in the UK with 'Take A Chance On Me'.
11 'I'm just a person,' says Bob Dylan after being called 'the God of folk song' by Japanese fans.
30 Topper Headon and Paul Simonon of the Clash are charged with criminal damage after shooting six racing pigeons. Siouxsie Sioux is thrown out of a Soho, London, public house for wearing a T-shirt showing two cowboys having homosexual intercourse.

April
8 Tom Robinson announces that he is seriously considering representing Britain at an International Convention of Young Communists in Cuba.
17 Sandy Denny, ex-Fairport Convention singer, goes into a coma after falling down a flight of stairs; she dies four days later.
29 Covent Garden's Roxy Club is forced to close after residents protest about fighting and hooliganism.
30 Tom Robinson Band lead the Anti-Nazi League Carnival from Trafalgar Square to Victoria Park in Hackney, London, where, along with X-Ray Spex, Steel Pulse and the Clash, they play to some 15,000 people.

May
3 *The Last Waltz*, a film of the Band's farewell performance at Winterland two years earlier, opens at several Bay Area theatres in San Francisco.
13 Tubes singer Fee Waybill falls off stage and breaks his leg at Leicester's De Montfort Hall while acting out their punk parody 'Johnny Bugger'.
24 *Melody Maker* writer Allan Jones is punched in the mouth by Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi over an article he wrote four years previously.

June
10 The Who's Pete Townshend offers to pay for 2000 copies of the Skunks' first single after hearing them at London's Vortex Club.
14 Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton rub shoulders with Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen at a Robert Gordon and Link Wray gig at the Music Machine in Camden, London.
17 German fans riot and set fire to the Lorelei Amphitheatre after Jefferson Airplane failed to appear because Grace Slick had severe stomach cramps.
18 A London Bohemian Love-In at the Roundhouse provides a bizarre union of punks and hippies, with Nik Turner and his band Sphynx, Tanz Der Youth, Steve Took's Horns, John Cooper Clarke, Patrik

THE SUN Friday

OON THE LOON

DEAD

lle of 'drug overdose'

ust hours after rock

rummer gets engaged

By GEORGE LYNN, BRIAN WESLEY and NINA RYSKOW

POP STAR Keith Moon, the loony-acting drummer of The Who rock group, died yesterday.

Moon and Annette early yesterday

Top: The Who's eccentric and extrovert drummer Keith Moon (above) dies of an overdose of drugs prescribed to cure his alcoholism. Left: Jimmy Pursey joins the Clash on stage at an Anti-Nazi League Carnival. Right: Sid and Nancy.

Fitzgerald, Roger Ruskin Spear, Michael Moorcock and Bob Calvert.

July

4 Joe Strummer is arrested at a gig at the Glasgow Apollo after trying to stop the bouncers manhandling members of the audience. Paul Simonon goes to his rescue and is also arrested. Both are later fined.

13/15 Graham Parker and the Rumour, the Fall, the Buzzcocks and Steel Pulse play a Rock Against Racism Festival in Alexandra Park, Manchester.

Capital Radio ban the Sex Pistols' new single, 'The Biggest Blow', which features vocals by train robber Ronnie Biggs, claiming it is 'a glorification of evil'.

August

5 Pete Meaden – the Who's first manager and a major influence on the London Mod scene in the Sixties – dies of barbiturate poisoning.

7 Les Perrin, leading PR man for the Stones, John Lennon, George Harrison and Frank Sinatra, dies at the age of 57.

19 Bryan Ferry reforms Roxy Music.

September

7 Who drummer Keith Moon is found dead in his Mayfair flat.

8 Johnny Rotten's new band Public Image Limited release their first single, 'Public Image'.

24 Elvis Costello, Aswad and Misty play for Rock Against Racism at Brockwell Park, Brixton. Sham 69 pull out, fearing that their presence will provoke violence.

October

7 Chet Helms puts on a 'Tribal Stomp' at the University of California. The bands appearing include Paul Butterfield, Country Joe, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Canned Heat plus poets, dancers and a light show. 'I'm high without acid,' he said afterwards.

9 French singer-songwriter Jacques Brel dies of a blood clot, aged 48.

12 Sid Vicious is charged with murdering his girlfriend Nancy Spungen.

23 Sid Vicious slashes his wrists with a razor blade and a broken light bulb while out on bail.

28 The Clash sack their manager Bernie Rhodes, who immediately sues the band for money he claims they owe him.

November

11 Midlands police investigate 'the sickest stunt ever staged by a punk-rock group' after the Birmingham based Anti-Social offer £15,000 to anyone willing to commit suicide on stage.

12 Johnny Rotten's lawyer applies to have the Sex Pistols' legal partnership wound up, and seeks an order preventing the use of the name Sex Pistols on any product not involving Rotten.

December

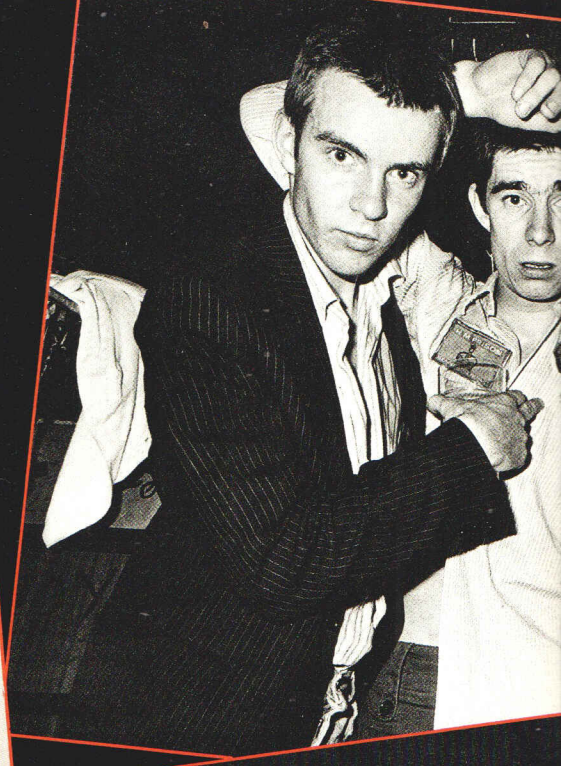
3 Elvis Costello and the Attractions lock themselves in their dressing room in Sydney after fans – who felt cheated because the band played for only an hour – pelted them with seats, yelling 'Elvis loves money' and 'Costello is a capitalist'.

8 Sid Vicious is slung into Rykers Island Jail, New York, after allegedly hitting Todd Smith – Patti's brother – with a bottle at Hurrah's disco.

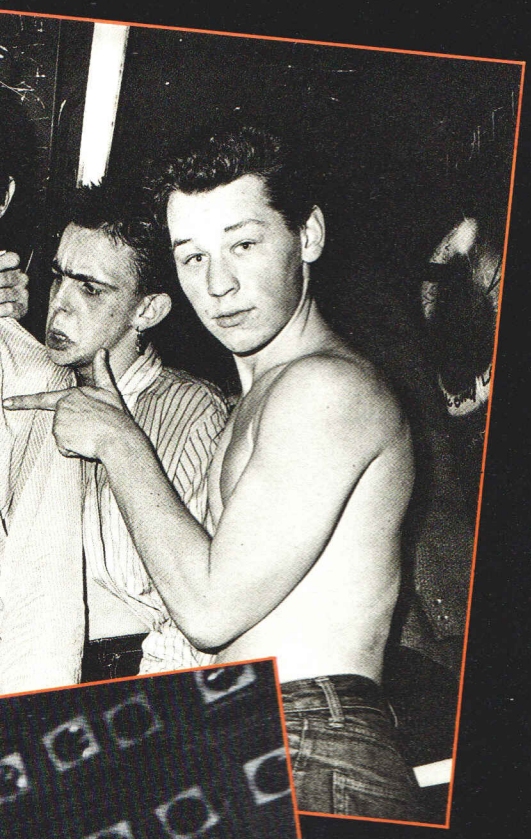
16 Kenney Jones is named as the new Who drummer.

25/26 Public Image Limited play their first gigs at London's Rainbow. Promoters remove all 1800 stall seats.

CHRIS SCHÜLER, JENNY DAWSON



BORSTAL BREAKOUT



Sham 69's bold bid for freedom

THE STORY OF Sham 69 is the story of a broken dream. Their garrulous singer Jimmy Pursey saw himself as a spokesman for working-class youngsters; he hoped to bring them together, and encourage them to forget their differences: 'If the kids are united they will never be defeated,' he sang.

'The kids', however, had other ideas. The more frequently Pursey issued his appeals for unity, justice and tolerance, the more regularly they turned his gigs into battlefields. The fights escalated into riots, and Pursey left the stage in tears at the Reading Festival in August 1978. One year later, it was all over for Sham 69: scared off by their violent reputation, no venue would book them.

Born and raised in Hersham, Surrey, Pursey ran away from home several times. At the age of 16, he embarked on a variety of jobs – everything from selling fruit on a barrow in the East End to working at Wimbledon greyhound track.

He started his musical career miming to records in pub discos and, in 1976, inspired by the excitement and possibilities of punk, decided to form his own band. The first Sham line-up was something of a false start, achieving little more than a series of gatecrashed university support gigs where 'no one took any notice of us'. In June 1977, Pursey broke up that band because 'they finally said they didn't believe in the songs', returning in the autumn with bassist Albie Maskall, drummer Mark 'Doidie' Cain and guitarist Dave Parsons. A three-track single, 'I Don't Wanna'/'Ulster'/'Red London', was released on Miles Copeland's Step Forward label in October that year.

A 'best mate'

By now, Sham 69 were building up a formidable army of fans, lured by the football-chant songs, the brazen punk roar of the music and the intense, hyperactive figure of Pursey himself. Yet despite this spectacle, Jimmy Pursey tried to project the personality of a 'best mate' rather than that of a rock star: 'I don't want people walking away saying "I spoke to Jimmy Pursey – he's a star". I want them to say, like: "Oh yeah, I spoke to Jimmy, he's alright, he's a good bloke".

'Something inside me tells me I should be getting up on stage and being a voicebox for those people, relaying back what I've felt from somebody else. It's like they're giving me the inspiration to write a song. I have to speak out for the people that inspire me.'

By the end of 1977, Sham 69 had signed a record deal with Polydor and changed their line-up again. Maskall left and was replaced by bassist Dave 'Kermit' Treganna. A single, 'Borstal Breakout' (one of the great Sham classics), backed with 'Hey Little Rich Boy', was released in January 1978, to be followed by the band's first and most popular album, *Tell Us The Truth*, the next month.

It was at that time that Jimmy Pursey described the audience he wanted to reach: 'A punk is a kid in Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Southampton who lives in a grimy industrial estate, wears an old anorak, dirty jeans, pumps, goes out at night, has a game of football on the green, throws a couple of bricks through a window for a bit of cheek. They're the punks, they're the kids that this was supposed to get over to.'

Consistently complaining about uniforms as adopted by the young people who wore them to identify with certain cults and factions, Pursey tried, in his familiar breathless and excitable way, to plead for individuality among the people in the crowds who came to see him. Predictably, his rantings fell on deaf ears.

That's Life

Another album, *That's Life*, arrived in the shops in October 1978 and sold well enough for Sham to be awarded a silver disc. At the ceremony, a typically unimpressed Pursey stamped the disc under his feet as a protest at Polydor's treatment of the Angelic Upstarts – a band he had signed to his own JP custom label and who were later dumped by Polydor.

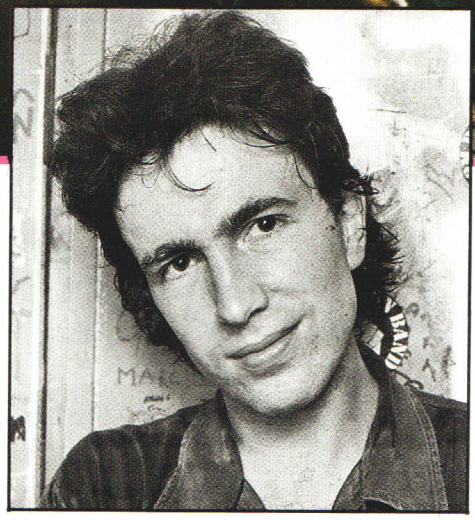
Despite recording a third and final album, *Hersham Boys* (1979) – a more light-hearted affair than its predecessors – Sham 69 were on their last legs. Disheartened by the growing scenes of violence at their gigs and dissatisfied with the group's direction, Pursey decided to wind up the band after an abortive project with former Sex Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook. 'I didn't want to make records and sell them for the sake of the record company. The other people in the band . . . wanted to go to America and I didn't. They wanted to do all the things that bands do and I didn't. I wanted to write about things that were heavy duty to them, and they wanted to write about other things.'

Dave Treganna went on to join Stiv Bators' Lords of the New Church, while Pursey made two solo LPs, *Imagination Camouflage* (1980) and *Alien Orphan* (1981). And so Sham 69 faded into history. Pursey's idealism remained unaffected by the experience: 'People say to me, "Punks and skinheads are always going to be like they are". If I believed that, I might as well kill myself now. I still believe the kids will be brought together when they understand themselves, and that's when they understand everybody else.' CAROL CLERK

Jimmy Pursey (top far left) and his band Sham 69 (top left) – from left Dave Parsons, Pursey, Albie Maskell and Mark Cain – were plagued by violence at their gigs (left and far left).

Sham 69
Recommended Listening

That's Life (Polydor Deluxe POLD 5010) (Includes: Leave Me Alone, Who Gives A Damn, Hurry Up Harry, That's Life, Angels With Dirty Faces, Evil Way).



Tom Robinson (left) played for many political causes, including Gay Pride Week (above). Above right: TRB at the Marquee.

On the march with the Tom Robinson Band

TOM ROBINSON'S MUSIC in 1978 was often described as the 'thoughtful end of the new wave', and Robinson, throughout his career, certainly saw his role as a musician as something far more serious than simply being an 'entertainer'. He was an ardent campaigner for all manner of radical political movements, frequently commenting in his lyrics on current political issues. He was also perfectly frank about his homosexuality; however, he was not at all coquettish or camp in the accepted showbiz tradition, but a candid, direct personality who made his homosexual preferences abundantly clear in interview and song.

A 'problem youth'

Whereas that other would-be radical of the new wave, Jimmy Pursey of Sham 69, sang glibly about a 'Borstal Breakout', it is interesting to note that the altogether more mild-mannered Robinson had actually spent seven years in a 'corrective institution' – a readjustment centre in Kent for 'problem youths' to which he was sent at the age of 16. Another inmate was guitarist Danny Kustow, and the two of them played in a group together as early as 1971. However, the pair parted company, and in 1973 Robinson moved to London where he formed Café Society. Originally an acoustic trio, Café Society made one LP, *Café Society* (1975), on Ray Davies' Konk label, before expanding in 1976 to a five-piece electric band.

During this period Robinson first took up the bass guitar. It was also at this time that he first came across punk, when he saw the Stranglers playing to 'an audience of maybe five people at the Hope and Anchor' and then the Sex Pistols at the 100 Club. 'I couldn't relate to it on any musical terms,' he later commented – but what he did relate to was the *impact* of these bands' music and the boldness of their ideas. He had already written several songs that went beyond the Sixties-style whimsy of Café Society; inspired by the message of punk, Robinson left to form his own Tom Robinson Band. He did a few gigs with a preliminary line-up at the end of 1976 before settling on a unit comprising himself on bass and vocals, Dolphin Taylor on drums, Mark Ambler on keyboards and his old friend Danny Kustow on guitar.

The Robinson band spent the first half of 1977 gigging around the London pubs, building up a strong grass-roots following. Musically they were offering nothing new – Kustow's guitar-playing in particular had more in common with old-style heavy rock than the new buzzsaw energy of his contemporaries. But where they scored was in the passion of their delivery, their youthful commitment and the fact that Robinson was unafraid to bellow out his 'Glad To Be Gay' anthem in West London pubs run by hard-faced Irish landlords generally less than sympathetic to the gay movement. TRB gigs became a cross between a political rally and a vaudeville show, with song-sheets, news-letters and bulletins bearing the clenched fist symbol being passed among the audience. EMI signed TRB in the autumn of 1977, and '2-4-6-8 Motorway', released in October, rapidly rose to Number 5 in the UK charts.

Coming out

It is ironic that the single that launched TRB into the big league should have been a completely agreeable, life-on-the-road slice of boogie. EMI were wary of their new signing's socio-political stance and Robinson at first went along with the company's overtly commercial approach. However TRB's follow-up, a live EP called *Rising Free* (released in February 1978), laid the band's cards firmly on the table. It included 'Don't Take No For An Answer', 'Martin',

'Right On Sister' and the celebrated 'Glad To Be Gay'. These four powerful songs underlined the group's commitment to equal rights for all – especially gays. Despite its forthright, agit-prop message, *Rising Free* still made Number 18 in the UK charts.

TRB's first album, *Power In The Darkness*, duly appeared in May 1978, but behind the scenes all was not well with the group. Mark Ambler, still only 17 years old, had become increasingly erratic in his behaviour and in April he was ousted from the band. Then, although the LP sold well, reaching Number 4 in the UK, Robinson fell foul of many of the pitfalls that attend success in the music business: 'I think what really happened is that we all got too big for our boots,' he commented with candour in a BBC radio interview with DJ Peter Powell. Ambler was finally replaced by Ian Parker on keyboards, but then at the end of 1978 drummer Dolphin Taylor left the band.

Robinson, Kustow and Parker recruited session drummer Preston Heyman to complete the recording of a second LP, *TRB 2* (1979) – by Robinson's own admission a thoroughly unsatisfactory collection of songs. 'I think I was trying to write the sort of songs that were expected of me – but it was becoming *Socialist Worker* set to music.' As the rock press turned against them, the band's morale fell further; after a patchy six-week tour of America TRB broke up in July 1979.

Robinson's seeming failure as a group leader caused a crisis of confidence and he suffered a nervous breakdown. He undertook his next project, Sector 27, on the understanding that he would not play the role of principal performer. Comprising Jo Burt (bass, vocals), Stevie Blanchard (guitar), Derek Quinton (drums) and Robinson (this time on guitar and vocals), Sector 27 tried to begin life as a co-operative, four-piece group playing all-new material, and aimed to build up a following on its own merits as a band; but inevitably gigs were sold on the basis of Robinson's name. Sector 27 released various singles and an album, *Sector 27* (1980), but by the summer of 1981 Robinson decided to leave. The band carried on without him, eventually becoming a duo of Burt and Blanchard calling themselves BB.

The best is yet to come

In January 1982, Robinson moved to Hamburg, West Germany, where he recorded an album, *North By Northwest*, with percussionist Steve Laurie and producer Richard Mazda. The album signalled a new maturity in Robinson's approach, which led the *New Musical Express* to comment that he 'no longer preaches the reassuringly right-on line to the converted, but rather reveals himself as a victim of incurable romanticism . . . his best yet'. While garnering this critical praise, Robinson also confirmed his status as the darling of the alternative circuit by releasing *Cabaret '79*, a live recording of a show which he had put on three years earlier at the Collegiate Theatre, London, as part of Gay Pride week.

Robinson's renaissance was complete when, in the summer of 1983, he unexpectedly scored his biggest UK hit since 'Motorway' with the poignant 'War Baby'. He had by this time dispensed with the notion of maintaining a band with fixed personnel, preferring 'to have a very loose group . . . anything between three and 12 members depending on the occasion'. Danny Kustow, who had joined ex-Jam drummer Rick Buckler's Time UK, played on 'War Baby', which reached Number 6 on Robinson's own Panic label.

Robinson spent the summer of 1983 touring the UK, avoiding the established rock circuit and instead playing civic theatres, arts labs, and at the Edinburgh Festival. He also commenced work on a new album for release at the end of 1983. A man of tenacity and integrity, he had answered those commentators who had written him off as a spent force. Having survived the extremes of success and dejection, Robinson still had much to offer as a recording artist in the Eighties.

DAVID SINCLAIR

Tom Robinson Band
Recommended Listening

Power In The Darkness (EMI EMS 1066681) (Includes: Up Against The Wall, Too Good To Be True, Long Hot Summer, You Gotta Survive, Power In The Darkness, The Winter of '79); *TRB 2* (EMI EMS 1652151) (Includes: All Right All Night, Black Angel, Let My People Be, Law And Order, Bully For You, Blue Murder).

Psychedelia and psychosis from punk's high priestess

THE FACE is a chiselled mask, all cheek-bones and black eyeliner, like an Egyptian tomb-painting. The voice, a cruel, hollow shriek, swoops gleefully on the lyric: 'Be a carcass, be a dead pork/Limblessly in love'. Love – or rather the 'moon-in-June' variety of love that infests the pop charts – lies bleeding as punk's most charismatic female performer stalks the stage. It is the winter of 1977-78: Siouxsie and the Banshees have a large cult following and a fearsome 'underground' reputation. Someone has spray-painted 'Sign The Banshees – Do It Now' on the walls of 15 London record companies. But none of them will touch the band.

Bouquet of barbed wire

Susan Janet Dallion was born on 27 May 1957, and grew up in the South London suburb of Chislehurst. At this point fact becomes entwined with the carefully constructed Banshee mystique: she allegedly attempted suicide at the age of six and was later ostracised at school for being a 'witch'. Her father died an alcoholic when she was 14, and she is reported to have laid a barbed-wire wreath on his grave.

She met Steve Bailey at a Sex Pistols gig in 1975. Two years older than Sue, he shared her musical interests. In addition to glam-rock – Bowie, Roxy Music, T. Rex – they both had a passion for American bands like the Velvet Underground, the New York Dolls and the Stooges. With their friends Bill Broad (later Billy Idol), Simon, Debbie and Sue Lucas (Catwoman), they attended every Pistols gig in 1976. The 'Bromley Contingent', as they were called, became famous as Sex Pistols camp followers, posing for photographs with the band and even joining them on stage at times.

Sue and Steve soon decided to stage a musical event of their own. With Sid Vicious on drums and Marco Pirroni (who eventually joined Adam and the Ants) on guitar, Suzie and the Banshees made their debut at the 100 Club Punk Festival in September 1976 on the same bill as the Sex Pistols, the Clash and the Subway Sect. Apart from Marco, none of them had ever touched an instrument before. The result was 20 minutes of musical mayhem called 'The Lord's Prayer'. Steve Havoc, as Bailey then called himself, played a rudimentary E-string drone on a borrowed bass guitar, Sid thumped his kit and Marco's guitar fed back excruciatingly, while Suzie intoned the prayer and bawled snatches of any song that came into her head – 'Twist And Shout', 'Knocking On Heaven's Door', 'Rebel Rebel'. 'God, it was awful,' said one A&R man present.

That December, 'Punk Shocker' Siouxsie – she had now adopted the idiosyncratic spelling – found herself on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* after appearing with the Sex Pistols on the occasion of their

notorious Bill Grundy interview on Thames TV's 'Today'. By now, she and Steve were rehearsing seriously, but the Banshees' line-up remained unstable. Malcolm McLaren's assistant Nils Stevenson had taken over from Marco, but he soon became their manager, and P. T. Fenton took over on guitar. However, his playing was considered too 'rock'n'roll' (a Banshees hate-word) and he was replaced in June 1977 by John McKay, whose spare, eerie style was far removed from mainstream rock traditions.

With Kenny Morris on drums, the band started performing in earnest in the spring of 1977. Their material, which included cover versions of T. Rex's '20th Century Boy' and the theme from the TV series 'Captain Scarlet', along with original songs like 'Psychic', 'Scrapheap', 'Make Up To Break Up', 'Love In A Void' and 'Bad Shape' – was delivered at breakneck speed; Siouxsie's voice was shrill and thin, but the beginnings of the characteristic Banshees sound could be heard. Every gig would end with 'The Lord's Prayer', which was performed differently each time. Siouxsie and Steve – who eventually settled on the surname Severin, after a character in the Velvet Underground song 'Venus In Furs' – were developing into a strong writing team. They kept cuttings and swapped ideas from their notebooks – anything with a touch of the bizarre or sinister was grist to their mill.

The band gigged steadily throughout 1977 and the first half of 1978, building a large and fanatical following. But despite an appearance on Granada TV's 'So It Goes' in November 1977 and a widely bootlegged session for the 'John Peel Show' on BBC Radio One, the Banshees remained without a record contract.

Scream of the Banshee

It wasn't only their fervent artistic independence that scared off the record companies. The Banshees had attracted considerable public notoriety because of Siouxsie's penchant for posing in bondage garments and a swastika armband. The bondage gear, she claimed, was 'to show that erogenous zones are overrated and tits are no big deal,' while the swastika was 'a symbol of shock . . . it was intended as nothing more'. Although the Banshees subsequently wrote to the *Melody Maker* protesting that 'We're not Nazis and we're getting pissed off for being shunned because of misquotes,' the image of Siouxsie as some kind of erotic Rhinemaiden was to plague the band for years.

On 9 June 1979, the Banshees finally signed to Polydor, who guaranteed the band a considerable degree of artistic control. When the Banshees objected to the company's choice of producer, Bruce Albertine, he was replaced by their own

Two faces of a Banshee: Siouxsie's strange and sinister stage presence (right) and rich, bizarre images (opposite) reflected the Banshees' changing music.

choice, Steve Lillywhite. Their first single, released that August, revealed the band's twin roots in glam-pop and the outer fringes of experimental music. The A-side, 'Hong Kong Garden', was an infectious number with a catchy 'oriental' guitar riff and brooding lyrics about imperialism, prostitution and drug trafficking, while the B-side, 'Voices', was a bizarre and haunting dream-soundtrack. The single reached Number 7 in the UK charts.

Siouxsie and the Banshees' debut LP, ominously titled *The Scream*, was released that October to ecstatic reviews and reached Number 25 in the album charts. On songs like 'Jigsaw Feeling', 'Mirage' and 'Suburban Relapse', Siouxsie delivered lyrics that explored the depths of neurosis and paranoia. Side one ended with one of their live favourites, a ferocious version of the Beatles' 'Helter Skelter' which began with a screech of guitar feedback over a death-knell bass before creaking into action like a rusty engine of torture.

The following year, they consolidated their position with two singles, 'The Staircase (Mystery)' and 'Playground Twist', and another album, *Join Hands*. This was an even more sombre affair than the first, but with the exception of a few tracks – like the intense dervish-dance of 'Icon' – it lacked the strength and sharpness of its predecessor. The lyrics were full of gothic imagery – skulls, coronets, catacombs and gallows – that reflected a move away from the harsh modernism of *The Scream* towards the barbaric splendour of their later albums.

Tales from the crypt

But tensions were developing within the group; the band's 'serious' intellectuals, Morris and McKay, felt that too many compromises were being made. Consistently outvoted by Siouxsie, Steve and Nils, they became increasingly frustrated. On 7 September 1979, the band arrived in Aberdeen at the beginning of the *Join Hands* tour. During an autograph session at a record shop, McKay and Morris had a public row with the rest of the band and stormed out.

Robert Smith, of support act the Cure, was drafted in as a temporary replacement for McKay. The new drummer was Budgie (real name Peter Clarke, born in St Helens, Lancashire, on 21 August 1957), formerly of Big In Japan and the Slits. With Smith playing two sets a night, one with the Cure and one with the Banshees, the tour resumed.

But before the Banshees could complete all the dates, Siouxsie collapsed with hepatitis. During her convalescence, she worked on new songs and learned to play the guitar. By the time she had recovered, Robert Smith had returned to his own band; when the Banshees' next single, 'Happy House', appeared in March 1980, it featured Magazine's guitarist John McGeoch in a guest capacity. He also contributed some jangling, acoustic 12-string playing to their next single, 'Christine' – a distinctly psychedelic-sounding song, based on the true story of a woman with 22 different personalities.

With help from John McGeoch and ex-Sex Pistol Steve Jones, the Banshees completed their third LP, *Kaleidoscope* (1980), which showed them moving away from their punk origins towards their own peculiar blend of Eighties psychedelia.

Despite the relative failure of the 1980 single 'Israel', John McGeoch decided to join the band as a full-time member in January 1981. Steve Severin, meanwhile, produced two singles and an LP for the Scottish band Altered Images. Later that year, he played guitar with Lydia Lunch at a one-off concert at the Venue in London, an excruciating performance in the tradition of 'The Lord's Prayer' which was recorded on a 12-inch EP, *The Agony Is The Ecstacy*.

That summer, a new Banshees single, 'Spellbound', and an album, *JuJu*, were released. Among their strongest records, they combined the brooding menace of their earlier work with a driving energy and the swirling patterns of McGeoch's guitar. Particularly effective tracks on the LP were 'Into The Light', 'Head Cut' and 'Halloween'.

After the album's release, the band embarked on a massive world tour which, they announced, would be their last. Siouxsie and Budgie then set up their own band-within-a-band, the Creatures, and produced a 5-track EP, *Wild Things*, a sparse but effective record of drums and vocals only. In November 1981, a Siouxsie and the Banshees compilation album, *Once Upon A Time: The Singles*, was released.

For all its atmospheric power, *JuJu* had been a consolidation of the Banshees' musical strengths rather than a development of them. The first sign that their music was moving in exciting new directions came in April 1982, with the release of 'Fireworks'. This single – featuring a string section arranged by Virginia Astley, formerly of the Ravishing Beauties – had a rich, sensuous quality far removed from the bleakness of their early works.

These developments were temporarily halted when Siouxsie lost her voice during a tour of Scandinavia. Doctors advised her to abstain from singing for six months, then take lessons to learn how to project her voice properly, or risk ruining it permanently. Ignoring their advice, she played at the Elephant Fayre in Cornwall that summer and completed a new LP.

A track from the album, 'Slowdive', appeared in August, but did badly in the charts despite its relentless dance-floor stomp. *A Kiss In The Dreamhouse* (1982) followed a month later: its sumptuous, gold-embossed sleeve reflected the rich exoticism of its music, which covered a wide variety of musical styles, ranging from the hushed, atmospheric 'Obsession' and the closed-circuit tape loop of 'Circle' to the trilling mandolin sounds of 'Melt!' and the late-night jazz of 'Cocoon'.

Pillars of the establishment

Shortly after the album's release, John McGeoch was mysteriously sacked. His replacement was none other than Robert Smith, who now decided to join the Banshees while continuing his career as singer/songwriter/guitarist with the Cure. Siouxsie and Budgie reactivated the Creatures, and had two hit singles. 'Miss The Girl' – their own composition – and an unlikely cover of Fifties jazz singer Mel Tormé's 'Right Now'. A trip to Hawaii produced an LP, *Feast*, recorded in local studios with local musicians. Steve Severin, meanwhile, contributed to Marc and the Mambas' LP *Torment And Toreros* (1983) and got together with Robert Smith and singer Jeanette Landray in a recording project called the Glove. This produced a single, 'Like An Animal', and an album, *Blue Sunshine* (1983).

By now the Banshees had renegotiated their contract with Polydor which provided them with their own label, Wonderland, on which all these side-projects also appeared. The next Banshees single, released in September 1983, was further evidence of their fascination with psychedelia and late-period Beatles – a somewhat insipid cover of John Lennon's 'Dear Prudence' from *The Beatles* (1968). This was an unexpected hit – the biggest the Banshees had ever had – reaching Number 3 in the UK charts.

With two sell-out performances at the Royal Albert Hall – recorded for a live double LP, *Nocturne* – a hit single that was even played on the BBC's easy-listening station, Radio Two, and plans to record an EP of four of their old songs with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the 1983-model Siouxsie and the Banshees were very much an establishment band – a far cry from their beginnings as the most extreme of punk's untouchables.

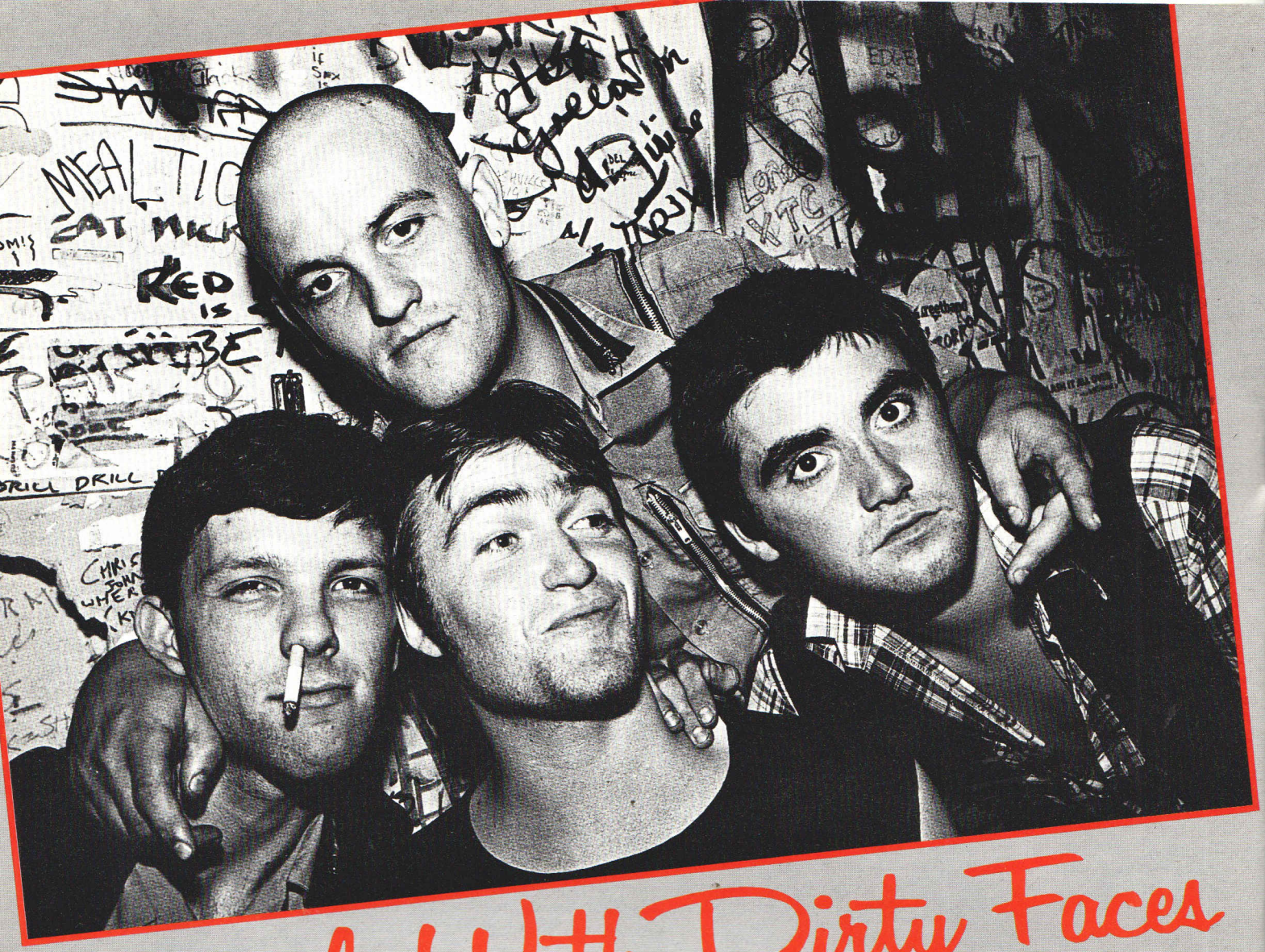
Their early, 'industrial' sound had defined the territory later explored by Joy Division, the Cure and countless others, while their later work had influenced a wide range of performers from Toyah to Soft Cell and Echo and the Bunnymen. This was their greatest achievement: like their main inspiration, the Velvet Underground, Siouxsie and the Banshees defined a whole area of sound, mood and feeling instantly recognisable as theirs, yet open for others to explore.

CHRIS SCHÜLER

Above left: The line-up that recorded The Scream, *from left Kenny Morris, Steve Severin, Siouxsie and John McKay. Left: Siouxsie with Budgie (drums) and John McGeoch (guitar). Above far left: Robert Smith fronts his band the Cure.*

Siouxsie and the Banshees Recommended Listening

The Scream (Polydor POLD 5009) (Includes: Jigsaw Feeling, Carcass, Helter Skelter, Metal Postcard, Mirage, Suburban Relapse); *Once Upon A Time: The Singles* (Polydor POLS 1056) (Includes: Hong Kong Garden, Playground Twist, Happy House, Christine, Israel, Spellbound).



Angels With Dirty Faces

Three of the bands that kept punk alive

THE GENERATION of punk bands that sprang up after the first outburst had died away faced a changed music scene. Groups like the UK Subs, the Angelic Upstarts and the Cockney Rejects were aware that the original shock value of punk had long passed: the revolution was over, the course of music had been irrevocably altered and it was now their job to keep the momentum going. All three bands used the powerful energy of punk to create exciting and new styles of their own. They went about it in different ways, but their separate routes took them all to BBC-TV's 'Top Of The Pops' and brought a whole series of line-up changes, disappointments, problems and triumphs.

From their very beginnings, the Subs, Upstarts and Rejects made every effort to uphold the important principles of punk. They were the personification of the new attitudes that made it possible for anybody and everybody to pick up a guitar and play it, to go to a gig and know that the group wanted to be at one with – rather than above – their audience. While earlier punk figures had become household names thanks to the national press, the punk bands of the later period were drinking in the pubs with their fans like any other 'normal' working people. As UK Subs vocalist and founder member Charlie Harper put it: 'Anybody can be a UK Sub'.

Those were the days

Harper recalls the pandemonium of 1978 with immense affection: 'There was a great sort of feeling in the atmosphere generally. Everyone was trying to work for something, everyone was joining bands and opening clubs, they were becoming DJs and starting independent labels and fanzines. People actually lived the music – they were involved.'

The UK Subs were formed in 1977, finding their identity in the autumn that year with the arrival of guitarist Nicky Garratt, who was to become Harper's co-writer. Within a couple of months, the group had played prestigious gigs at the Roxy Club and the London Marquee, the 100 Club and the Vortex, as well as smaller shows at any pub that would have them.

'These gigs of ours tied in with the whole punk attitude of doing things for yourself,' Harper recalled. 'People were so hungry for music. We used to put on our own punk nights and get friends who had bands on the bill with us. Every band would bring 50, maybe 100 people.'

In the winter of 1978 their first single, 'CID', came out on City Records. It didn't chart, but their next single 'Stranglehold' made the UK Top Thirty and brought them a management deal early in 1979. This launched the Subs on a successful run of singles – 'Tomorrow's Girls', the *She's Not There* EP, 'Warhead' and 'Teenage' – that would win them a whole string of 'Top Of The Pops' appearances.

In September 1979 the UK Subs consolidated their fortunes with the release of their first album, *Another Kind Of Blues*, on Gem Records. Although the album has grown to sound almost subdued with the passing of time, the Subs' live sound was full of speed, volume and aggression, with

Charlie Harper bellowing like a rampant escapee from an asylum. Lyrically, the Subs' concerns ranged from the dole queue and the nuclear threat to the more usual rock subject-matter of love and sex.

From the atmospheric leanings of the *Brand New Age* album (1980) through the more directly experimental *Diminished Responsibility* (1981) and *Endangered Species* (1982) to the ambitious *Flood Of Lies* (1983) with its 'positive punk' overtones, the UK Subs widened their abilities and effectiveness without losing the powerful thrust that had always been at the heart of their music. Nor did they lose their sense of responsibility to the fans – their claim that 'anybody can be a UK Sub'.

The conflicts within this set of attitudes eventually led to the end of the long-term Harper-Garratt partnership. Charlie, with his 'man of the people' stance and his love for the pub and club circuit, insisted that the band continue to play small clubs alongside the larger venues they could now fill. Nicky Garratt was afraid that the UK Subs would become *too* accessible and lose sections of their following. This was indeed what started to happen, and Charlie struck out on his own in 1983 to rebuild the group.

Canning Town rejects

The Cockney Rejects – another London band – had no such reservations about fame and fortune. As vocalist Jefferson (previously Stinky) Turner said: 'I want to go to America and be a big star, have a

Above left: An early line-up of the Angelic Upstarts. Right: Upstart Mensi throttles a savage microphone with his bare hands. Above right: The Cockney Rejects, from left Vince Riordan, Jefferson 'Stinky' Turner and Micky Geggus.

house and a swimming pool.' Despite such grandiose ambitions, they quite happily continued hanging around the old haunts in their Canning Town homeland.

'Our music has always been about ourselves,' commented bassist Vince Riordan in 1981. 'Our lives always revolved round a big shithouse of a place called East London. We sang about violence because it was all we ever knew. People class us a lot of yobs which we were to start off with, but we've grown up now.'

Their first record, the *Flares And Slippers* EP, appeared on the independent Small Wonder Records in June 1979: the band's line-up then consisted of Stinky Turner (vocals), Micky Geggus (guitar), Chris Murrel (bass) and Paul Harvey (drums), but the next month saw a change in the rhythm section with Vince Riordan and Andy Scott coming in on bass and drums respectively.

The Rejects built up a large following that included many skinheads attracted by their football-terrace type music, which incorporated singalong chants and choruses and a thumping beat. They steadily acquired a reputation for violence at their gigs. 'I suppose you could blame us for being the instigators,' Micky admitted. 'We would incite trouble from the stage now and again and we'd jump in. Then we realised we were wrong. Our position in the music world was more important to us – we had everything to lose.'

But this realisation came too late for the Cockney Rejects. Very few venues would book them because of their early notoriety and their later association with Oi! – a movement they claim to have created but later disowned when its inherent violence led to a riot at Southall's Hambrough Tavern in 1981.

Getting heavy

As the Rejects carried on in the face of all opposition, they moved away from their old format, which had taken them to 'Top Of The Pops' with 'The Greatest Cockney Rip-Off' in April 1980 and 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' the following May. Released in July 1981, *The Power And The Glory* was a hard-edged album but impressively melodic and a great deal more thoughtful than any of their three jokingly-titled *Greatest Hits* volumes. The damage had been done, however, and it was clear that the Rejects could no longer function in the punk format. As a result they met up with ex-UFO man Pete Way and renewed their earlier associations with heavy metal, releasing an album, *The Wild Ones*, in 1982 and working on plans for a new career that had little to do with their beginnings.

Fiercely political, determined to stand up for working-class people and to rage about their problems, Sunderland's Angelic Upstarts combined a strong sense of melody and a unique flair for choruses with some of the angriest lyrics to be heard anywhere. Equally likely to burst into thick Geordie recitations, soulful ballads or rocking anthems, singer Mensi delivered

Below: The UK Subs, from left Pete Davies (drums), Charlie Harper (vocals), Nicky Garratt (guitar) and Paul Slagg (bass). Above: Chief Sub Harper bellows away.

one tirade after another, yelling about everything from police brutality to the injustices of Conservative Britain: 'We're always going to sing about things that are relevant – we don't put our heads in sacks.'

Like the Cockney Rejects, the Angelic Upstarts first appeared on the small independent label Small Wonder, releasing singles like 'The Murder Of Liddle Towers', a raw, angry protest song about a man who died from injuries sustained while he was being arrested. They later signed to Warner Brothers and had hit singles with 'I'm An Upstart' and 'Teenage Warning' (both 1979).

These three groups were typical of the staunchly down-to-earth approach of the later punk bands. Although critics had long since pronounced punk dead, they carried on regardless of fashion, drawing considerable audiences and making a number of hit singles. Charlie Harper of the UK Subs summed it up when he said: 'I'll still be playing down the local pub once or twice a week in 20 years' time if I'm still here. An' that'll be good enough for me.'

CAROL CLERK

Angelic Upstarts
Recommended Listening

Angel Dust (The Collected Highs 1978-1983) (Anagram GRAM 007) (Includes: The Murder Of Liddle Towers, Police Oppression, I'm An Upstart, England, Never Say Die, Solidarity).

Cockney Rejects
Recommended Listening

Greatest Hits: Vol 1 (EMI ZONO 101) (Includes: Headbanger, Fighting In The Streets, Shitter, New Song, East End, Where The Hell Is Babylon?).

UK Subs
Recommended Listening

Recorded 1979-1981 (Abstract INT 145.066) (Includes: Warhead, Stranglehold, Scum Of The Earth, Emotional Blackmail, Keep On Running).

INDEPENDENTS' DAY

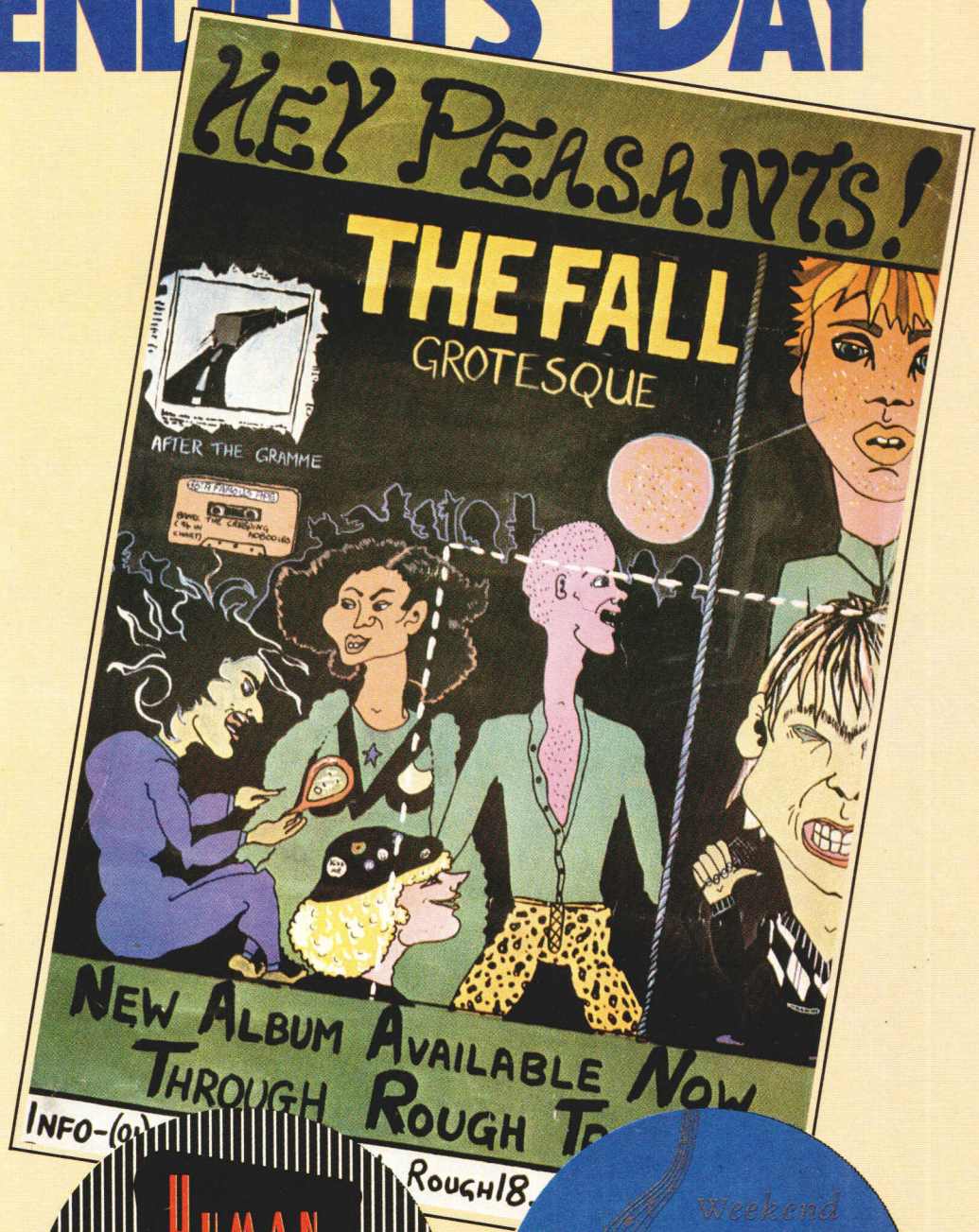
The rise of the little label in UK rock

THE RECORD INDUSTRY in the Seventies was dominated by five major companies: EMI, CBS, Kinney Communications (who owned WEA), RCA and the German multinational Polydor/Phonogram. With their commitment to profit and chart success and their control over a band's image and, in some cases, their music, they were profoundly unappealing to the new wave of anti-establishment punk bands.

To many more, they were simply inaccessible. The majors all ran up massive overheads on recording, advertising campaigns, promotion and entertainment. By 1975, the British Phonographic Industry – the business' trade association – calculated that the average single had to sell 27,285 copies to recoup these costs. There was no place in this system for bands of more limited appeal, who could have made a respectable living by spending less extravagantly. And since the abolition of a statutory retail price in the late Sixties, most records were sold cheaply through bulk outlets like F. W. Woolworth and W. H. Smith, stores which only stocked albums in the Top Fifty.

In response to this situation, a whole new wave of independent labels sprang up

Manchester band the Fall (right) enjoyed a long and successful career on Rough Trade with their unique blend of snarled satire and abrasive music. Below: A selection of independent labels.



to cater for new bands who demanded a degree of creative autonomy and often appealed to a smaller group of listeners.

There had always been independents of one sort or another, particularly in the US where labels like Sun and Atlantic were just a part of a lively tradition that continued through the Sixties; in the Seventies, Sire and Beserkley were influential in the growth of the American new wave. In the UK, meanwhile, Stiff and Chiswick sprang from the ashes of the pub-rock movement.

These labels proved that records could be released successfully for far lower overheads than the majors allowed for. Only one record in 20 released by major companies covered its costs – the rest sold very little. But Stiff and Chiswick, releasing records by the Count Bishops, Nick Lowe and the Damned, sold nearly 15,000 copies of virtually every single they released. Using eye-catching picture bags and witty, well-placed advertising, and by carefully placing their records in specialist shops, they managed to publicise their product while avoiding the expensive methods of the majors.

This was a more attractive option for the smaller bands and, by the end of 1977, a vast number of small independents had sprung up in the UK; New Hormones in Manchester released the Buzzcocks' first record, the *Spiral Scratch* EP, at the beginning of 1977 and provided an outlet for other local bands like Ludus; The Label's roster included the punk band Eater; Deptford Fun City was home for Squeeze and Mark P's Alternative Television; Cherry Red provided a UK outlet for American punks the Dead Kennedys and the Runaways; even Eighties supergroup the Police had their first single, 1977's 'Fall Out', released on an independent, Illegal.

Normal service

Many of these labels were little more than a name under which a band or an individual put out their self-produced records. The Desperate Bicycles recorded their EP *The Medium Is The Tedium* in 1977 for a total cost of just a few hundred pounds. At this level of cost, a record only had to sell about 1500 copies to break even, which was easily possible by then through the network of independent distributors like Lightning Records and Rough Trade.

Some of these 'own label' projects later developed into larger operations, like Mute. Formed in 1978 by Daniel Miller, the label's original release was a one-off single, 'Warm Leatherette'/'TVOD', by Miller himself under the name the Normal. The song was later covered by disco star Grace Jones, bringing in further funds, and the label went on to become an outlet for the highly successful electro-pop

Left: X-Mal Deutschland vocalist Anja. Relatively unknown in their native Germany, the band found success on the UK indie 4AD. Above left: Rough Trade hitmakers Stiff Little Fingers.

bands Depeche Mode and Yazoo.

This small-scale independent activity was made possible by a network of independent shops and distributors. By 1977, most large towns – and many smaller ones – had an independent record shop. They also served as meeting places and information exchanges, distributing home-made cassettes and fanzines.

Gold Fingers

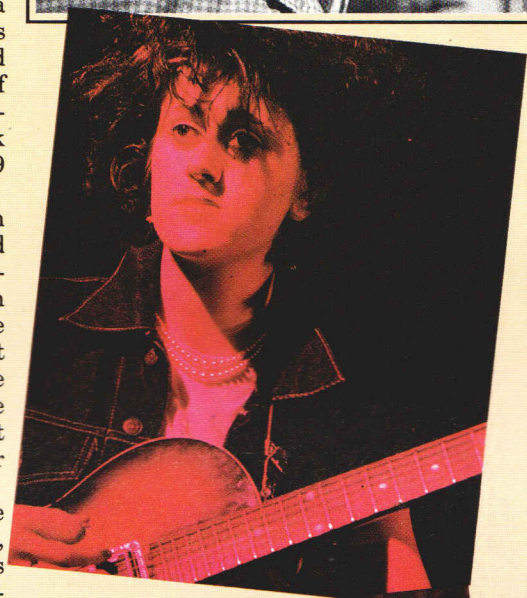
Rough Trade was opened as an independent record shop in West London by Geoff Travis in 1976. It began distributing records by mail order early in 1977, and by the end of the year it had established a wholesale business. Since they kept receiving tapes from groups who could not get a record deal, it seemed logical to start a label themselves. Their first single was 'Paris Maquis', by the French punk band Metal Urbain, but the label really took off after the release of their first LP, *Inflammable Material* by the Northern Irish punk band Stiff Little Fingers, in February 1979 – by July, the album had gone gold.

This success enabled Rough Trade – an employee-managed co-operative – to build up a range of services for its artists: a publishing company, Rough Trade Music, an independent press and promotional service and a booking and tour management agency. Their roster grew to include Robert Wyatt, Red Crayola, Pere Ubu, the Fall, the Raincoats and Scritti Politti, but they continued to act as distributors for other less established names.

The late Seventies were undoubtedly the heyday for independent labels in the UK, but the climate was changing. The majors had been seriously shaken by this unexpected development: one CBS executive is reported to have arrived at a board meeting brandishing a handful of independent singles and demanding to know 'why haven't we got these bands?' Their response was to tempt away many of the bands who had made their name on indie labels with lucrative offers: Rough Trade's own most successful band, Stiff Little Fingers, signed to Chrysalis, where their career began to go downhill. Another tactic was to establish 'cosmetic' labels – often recruiting staff from the independents, who found it hard to refuse the offer of job security and a living wage. WEA set up Korova, which signed Echo and the Bunnymen, Polydor created Fiction, while Phonogram set up Back Door. These labels offered bands at least some kind of control over their product.

With the decline of punk, the indie boom began to falter. Bands were less concerned with creative control, aiming only at 'Top Of The Pops' once again. The music press – with the exception of *Sounds* and *ZigZag* – withdrew its support; reviewers adopted a cynical tone towards independent records, and *New Musical Express* dropped the listings of home-made cassettes that had provided such a valuable information service. Indies were suddenly unfashionable.

Several of the smaller companies went under: Small Wonder, which had successfully launched the careers of punk bands like the Angelic Upstarts, folded in 1981. Rough Trade and the other major indies were forced to become more selective in their releases, and it became harder for unknown bands to get their records distributed. In 1981, Rough Trade decided to concentrate on pushing their most commercial bands, Scritti Politti and Aztec Camera, and in the summer of 1982, Scritti Politti's debut album *Songs To Remember* reached Number 12 in the UK charts.



Top: The Cocteau Twins. With the aid of extensive airplay on John Peel's radio show, the Scottish duo's second LP Head Over Heels *shot straight to the top of the indie charts in 1983. Centre: Tracy Thorne – one third of the Marine Girls, solo performer and reluctant star of the new jazzy acoustic pop music. Above: Alison Statton of Weekend.*

Quiet Giants

In 1982, Rough Trade streamlined the independent distribution by setting up the Cartel. This was a group of regional companies – Backs in Norwich, Fast Product in Edinburgh, Probe in Liverpool, Red Rhino in York and Revolver in Bristol – all of which had started as small shops. These outlets serviced the indie shops in their region, while Rough Trade continued to act as a central clearing house.

Despite the recession, there was still a healthy, if somewhat reduced, independent scene in the early Eighties. Rough Trade had come up with an exciting new band in the form of Young Marble Giants from Cardiff. This quiet and subtle pop group had recorded one excellent single, 'Final Day' and an album, *Colossal Youth* (1980) before they split. Their singer Alison Statton went on to front Weekend, a band very much in the new strain of jazzy, acoustic pop that was being encouraged by Cherry Red A&R man Michael Alway. After joining Cherry Red in 1980, he built up a new roster of acts like Eyeless in Gaza, Thomas Leer, Felt, Tracey Thorne, Ben Watt and the Marine Girls.

Together with the Beggar's Banquet subsidiary 4AD, whose discoveries included Modern English, the German band X-Mal Deutschland and the strange, swirling hypnotic music of the Cocteau Twins, Cherry Red represented one of the most exciting strands in the UK music scene in 1983; although no longer the fashionable cause they were in the punk heyday, the independent labels still had a vital role to fulfil.

PHYLLIS TYNE

The Politics of Punk

Musical manifestos and a radical message

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS in the Fifties, rock music offered the promise of rebellion. In an age of strict morality, racial segregation and political conformism, it lauded sex, adopted the mannerisms of black R&B and projected a defiant individualism. Yet rock was more a *symbol* of rebellion then the act itself – many of rock's early heroes, like Elvis Presley, were profoundly conservative, God-fearing Americans. It was only with the hippie era that the supposed rebelliousness of rock music became part of an entire lifestyle founded on opposition to the status quo. But success and its rewards saw such a stance abandoned.

When punk came along in the mid Seventies, its heroes were thus able to rebel not just against the establishment at large but against the rock establishment – the previous generation's rebels. 'Just the sight of one of their album covers makes me sick,' the Clash's Joe Strummer said about Led Zeppelin, while Sex Pistol Johnny Rotten sported a Pink Floyd T-shirt he had defaced with the words 'I hate'.

The fight against racism

Fuel was added to the fire in 1976 when David Bowie and Eric Clapton expressed fascist and racist sentiments in public. Coming at a time of increased activity in Britain by fascist groups like the National Front and the British Movement, these incidents led to the formation of Rock Against Racism. This organisation, dedicated to combating racism among young rock audiences, staged many benefits to raise money for anti-racist campaigns.

Rock Against Racism also produced a lively fanzine, *Temporary Hoarding*, which successfully adapted punk graphics to convey a political message. One of their covers juxtaposed the faces of Bowie and Clapton with that of Hitler, beneath the headline 'Love Music, Hate Racism'. Many prominent musicians played for RAR, and its success inspired many similar campaigns, from Rock Against Sexism in the UK to Rock Gegen Rechts (Rock Against The Right) in West Germany.

Rock Against Racism had close links with another anti-racist organisation, the Anti-Nazi League. Although this was aimed at a wider section of the public than just young rock audiences, there was considerable overlap between the two groups, and one of the ANL's biggest successes was a rally in Victoria Park, Hackney, East London, on 30 April 1978, at which the Clash, the Tom Robinson Band and X-Ray Spex played. In spite of allegations that they were merely front organisations for the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party, RAR and the ANL undoubtedly succeeded in combining rock music, striking graphics and a flair for organising demonstrations and carnivals to make rock audiences aware of anti-fascist and left-wing ideas.

Among the bands who played for RAR and the ANL were several whose songs were explicitly political. Apart from the Clash, with their macho 'urban guerrilla' stance, there was the Tom Robinson Band – who suffered, perhaps, from an excess of rhetoric – and the Gang of Four, from Leeds, whose début LP *Entertainment* (1979) welded fierce Marxist polemic to an angry blend of punk and funk.

One of the most successful political commentators in the music world at that time was Elvis Costello. 'Night Rally', from the LP *This Year's Model* (1978), was a chilling evocation of a clandestine fascist meeting, while his 1979 UK Number 2 single 'Oliver's Army' attacked the use of mercenaries. One of the simplest, catchiest political messages was contained in the Beat's 1980 single 'Stand Down Margaret' – a plea with which leftists, the unemployed and CND supporters alike could identify.

With the growth of the peace movement in the Eighties, the focus for political music-making shifted to groups like No Nukes Music and CND. Many groups such as the Beat, Madness, Orange Juice and the Jam – whose 1980 Number 1 single 'Going Underground' dealt with the nuclear threat – lent their services. The same year, two other anti-nuclear songs made the UK charts: Orchestral Maneouvres in the Dark had a Number 8 hit with 'Enola Gay' (the name of the aircraft that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima) and Kate Bush reached Number 16 with 'Breathing' (about an unborn child in the womb at the time the bomb drops). Glastonbury Fayre, a regular fixture in the festival calendar since the early Seventies, became a CND fund-raising event; in 1983, the bill included Curtis Mayfield, the Fun Boy Three (who burned the US flag on stage) and the visiting Nigerian band King Sunny Adé and his African Beats.

One area that the hippie 'revolution' had totally failed to address was that of sexism. Apart from a few exceptions like Grace Slick and Janis Joplin, women singers were associated with 'pretty' commercial pop. While punk hardly reversed this state of affairs, it did see the emergence of more women musicians like the Adverts' Gaye Advert and Tina Weymouth of Talking Heads, and more all-women bands like the Raincoats, the Slits and the Mo-Dettes. It also made sexual politics a popular topic for lyrics, with mixed-sex bands like the Delta Five and the Au Pairs writing some cutting songs about relations between the sexes.

Tom Robinson emerged in the late

Seventies as an energetic campaigner for gay rights; the subject of homosexuality had previously only been drawn upon by the likes of David Bowie to provide a titillating whiff of decadence. The singalong tune of Robinson's anthem 'Glad To Be Gay' (1978) could not conceal a sense of bitterness and injustice: 'Lie to your workmates, lie to your folks/Put down the queens, tell anti-queer jokes/Gay Lib's ridiculous, join their laughter/The buggers are legal now – what more are they after?'

Sales tactics

While many bands and organisations of the period showed considerable flair for campaigning and commentary, few seemed able to extend their political commitment into the economics of what they did. Without control of production and distribution, the most radical statements could be marketed and assimilated as just another commodity. 'The Revolutionaries Are On CBS' was an advertising slogan in the Sixties, and with the Clash signed to that label, and Tom Robinson and the Gang of Four on EMI, the situation in the late Seventies seemed little different.

A few small independents, like Recommended Records, whose roster included German experimentalists Faust, Slapp Happy and former Henry Cow members like Lindsey Cooper, offered an alternative, but lacked the broad appeal of the younger bands. A more successful attempt to bridge this gap was made by the Midlands-based 2-Tone label. Drawing on reggae's tradition of political comment and the furious energy of punk, Coventry band the Specials formed their own label, which they licensed to Chrysalis, retaining control over releases and artwork while availing themselves of the distribution facilities of a major label.

2-Tone's most conspicuous success came in the summer of 1981, when the Specials headlined an open-air concert in their home town to raise money for the Coventry Committee Against Racism, which had been set up after a series of vicious racial attacks in the city. Their single 'Ghost Town', a chilling picture of unemployment and urban decay, had reached Number 1 in the UK charts a few weeks earlier.

The growth of extreme right-wing movements like the National Front (top right) prompted the formation of Rock Against Racism to oppose them (right).

Although 2-Tone continued to release a series of excellent political singles from the Special AKA (the remnants of the now-defunct Specials and label-mates the Bodysnatchers) as the Eighties continued, the label's fortunes declined as the record industry swung back towards safe, uncontroversial pop. The groups that survived the changes in pop fashion were those who – true to the spirit of punk autonomy – chose to work entirely outside the constraints of the commercial music business.

The most successful of these were the anarchist band Crass. Releasing records on their own label, with no advertising or radio airplay but gigging constantly on the benefit circuit, Crass built up a vast following in the late Seventies and early Eighties, their records regularly appearing at the top of the independent charts and even making inroads into the commercial chart. Taking their cue from the Sex Pistols, the former anarchist hippies cut their hair and despatched communiqués from their Epping commune in the form of punk singles like 'Big A Little A'.

Even Crass's most extreme musical ventures – excruciating collages of discordant sounds like 'Reality Asylum' and 'Nagasaki Nightmare' – failed to alienate their growing punk following, while a series of inspired stunts kept them in the public eye. The Royal Wedding in 1981 was celebrated by a special flexi-disc, which they somehow persuaded a girls' teenage magazine into giving away as a free gift. Its decidedly unromantic view of marriage brought them headlines in the *News Of The World*. The Falklands conflict of 1982 provoked the single 'How Does It Feel (To Be Mother Of 1000 Dead?)', which breached the House of Commons' rules of privilege by using a taped broadcast of a parliamentary debate. If the Sex Pistols had introduced the word anarchy to punk, Crass made it the movement's dominant political ideology.

Out of the kitchen

Perhaps the most exciting political band of the early Eighties, however, were the Poison Girls. They started out supporting Crass and releasing records on the Crass label, but after their excellent LP *Chappaquiddick Bridge* (1980) they decided to go it alone, although they later signed to the small independent label Illuminated. Fronted by Vi Subversa, a housewife in her forties, the Poison Girls broke all the rules about how pop groups – even anti-establishment ones – were supposed to look and act. While Crass remained aloof and even sinister on stage, the Poison Girls were warm and approachable. Their music, too, was more accessible, ranging from stomping numbers like 'State Control And Rock And Roll' to beautiful ballads like 'I'm Not Too Proud' and strange, ethereal songs like 'Cinnamon Garden'.

Simply by being who she was, Vi Subversa offered a far more profound challenge to the rock establishment than, say, the Clash or the Gang of Four ever could. While the age of a jazz or soul performer has always been irrelevant, rock has traditionally derived its identity from the idea of 'youth' and its problems.

The idea of generational conflict has served to distract rock's 'rebels' from the more fundamental inequalities of race, class and gender. Rock may have caused the self-appointed guardians of public morals a few sleepless nights, but it has succeeded in changing little. Until rock could rid itself of the idea that a young, strutting, white male – be he Elvis Presley or Joe Strummer – was somehow 'rebellious', it seemed that it would never realise its full potential as a popular music capable of effecting serious social change.

CHRIS SCHÜLER

Below: 'Big Brother' adorns the cover of this Poison Girls single. Below right: Profits from the Beat's 'Stand Down Margaret' went to the Anti-Nuclear Campaign. Bottom: Music against the bomb.

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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